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THE DANCE OF DINWIDDIE

MARSHALL MORETON





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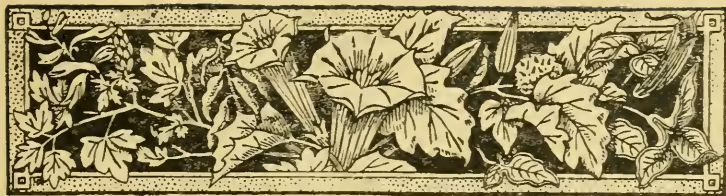
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The Dance of Dinwiddie



There the dancers had come on the evening before.



The Dance of Dinwiddie

BY
MARSHALL MORETON

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The Dance of Dinwiddie



A HOUSE and a barn on an acre of ground—
And there was n't another of either around
Save the houses afloat that went flying apast,
For the waters had closed all around them at last.
There the dancers had come on the ev'ning before
In their high-seated wagon—a full score or more,
With fiddlers and one they called "Oracle," who
Was a modern Sebastian Cerezo, and knew
(About dancing and things) more than any one 'round
In the house or the barn on the acre of ground.

'T was at the great bend near the town of Dinwiddie
On the banks of the river Ohio, and giddy,
The gay, dizzy dance, like a far-away echo,
Seems laughing to me of a time long ago,
In the merry round waltz and the songs for the reels,
In the "Oracle's" rhymes that were slicker than eels,

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And the snug little town whence the dancers had come
On the evening before to the old country home,
Is as fresh to my mind as the tall trees around
The frame house and the barn on the acre of ground.

There the tall trees are standing, still standing alone
Like sentinels now, and are now taller grown,
Where once was the homestead. How often I 'm told
By the boatmen who traveled the river of old,
That they never can pass round the great sweeping
bend

But the dance is recalled, and they think of the end
That so suddenly came to the cherished old place;
They note the tall trees as its last lingering trace—
Their long branches waving as if in a trance
From a waltz they had caught on the night of the dance.

There often the town folks, still curious, stray
To look o'er the place on a summery day,
Recounting the story when nearing the sight,
And some one will tell of the dance of that night,
Of the dancers who came there that evening before—
Not thinking the river could rise any more—

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Will sing the reel songs and will point to the place
Where once stood the house on that now crumbling base
When caught in the flood on that night without warning
To the dancers within till the dawn of the morning.

'T was a house of firm structure, but fashioned quite
plain,

With its hallway, its rooms and a roof 'gainst the rain,
With a story below and a story above,

And the rooms were all ample and wide; but the love
For the house was of measure far more than its worth.

'T was the mem'ries that ever recurred for its hearth
That made it so precious. I love to recall

The long row of windows, the doorway and hall,

And fondly thought lingers—in fancy I see

The trees that seem nodding and laughing to me.

The farm swept the valley to right and to left

For a mile to the hill where the quarry was cleft.

From the house to the hill it was level and low,

And oft in the spring-time the flood-tide would grow

Till the back-waters covered the fields at their will,

But they lay there as peaceful and placid and still

The Dance of Dintwiddie

As the mountain lakes seem, then, as if in a dream,
They would gently recede as they followed the
stream;

And the house and the barn that were built on a mound
Overlooked the great river and all of the ground.

'T was Twilleger's farm. It was Twilleger's way
To give a big dance and be joyous and gay
In the early spring season. It did his soul good
To gather around him the whole neighborhood;
For Twilley (they called him) had ways of his own,
And except a few servants, he lived quite alone.
In the early spring season, when cider grows harder,
He would stock up his cellar and also his larder,
And then would invite the gay dancers to come
From out of the town to the old country home.

For a week, ere the night of the dance, a high tide
Of water had covered the farm to the side
Of a road running out from the house to the hill.
'T was receding, they said—it was even and still.
Yet the sky had been sullen and surcharged with rain,
And there was an unrest at the threatening gain



They were coming, were coming.

The Dance of Dinwiddie

Of the waters that leaped o'er the banks at the shore
To a point that was higher than known of before,
For the early spring thaw of the deep-lying snow
In the mountains augmented the high overflow.

But the clear sky it left when the sun had declined
On the eve of the dance reassured every mind.
How balmy and sweet was the evening! How fair
Was the face of all nature that smiled everywhere!
Far out on the highway their voices rang clear
As the dancers were coming with song and a cheer
In their wagon that rumbled along with its load.
They were coming, were coming far down on the road,
And to meet them, away ran the great baying hound
To lead them down home to the acre of ground.

There the dancers were welcomed by Twilley soon
after,
Where they filled all the rooms with a chatter and
laughter.
Their sparkling bright eyes showed their fine healthy
thriving,
And joyous and mirthful, their wits were soon striving,

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And many sly banters and rail'ries were given
To lovers, that were in turn back again driven,
For some of them loved to be told of their love,
Whilst others were shy and as mild as a dove,
And just as soft-cooing—to some there's a pleasure
In hiding their love as the birds hide their treasure.

Now most of the women who came from the town
Were sweetly suburban in manner and gown,
Though none the less merry or jauntily gay,
Whilst some were profuse in a brilliant display.
Selina! Selina was there! Were there ever
Such eyes as Selina's? No wonder the river
Crept higher and higher to bask in the light
Of her dark, rolling eyes. No wonder that night
That the stars faded fast and from envy withdrew,
For her eyes were far brighter—they every one
knew.

Ah, the runaway laugh of Louisa still rings
Like a merry and lingering echo. It brings
Recollections of pink-glowing cheeks, and a girl
Whose fun-loving spell set the house in a whirl,

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As her laughter ran riot and touched everywhere,
Till Amanda, the chaperon, with dignified air
And a fine, arching brow, was compelled to unbend
And to follow the frivolous, frolicsome trend
Of a something she knew not—she was n't half sure
If she laughed with Louisa or just at her laughter.

But 't is needless to point all their feminine graces,
Or with blund'ring endeavor to profile their faces,
For every one knows where the prodigal nature
Once lavished the rarest of all of her treasure;
Where she hung the steep hill in a moment of leisure,
And dreamed the sweet valleys with lingering pleasure;
She smiled, and the streamlets will run there forever
And yield their full measure to form the great river;
But how void were the hills and the valleys and waters,
Till she brought there the fairest of all of her daughters.

All the beauties were there from the strath-haven
town,
And some were so queenly they lacked but the crown;
And the men, while of no very special great talent,
There was yet a lieutenant with airs that were gallant.

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There was also a wit who was quite proud of it,
Who teased an old bachelor—not sociable a bit,
For love so absorbed him he smiled and was mute,
While Malinda just laughed and encouraged his suit,
Till the heart of the bachelor grew light as a feather,
And he and Malinda drew closer together.

And even the cynical Simon was won
As the chatter of dancers went merrily on,
Till once he laughed loudly and ever so jolly—
'T was all on account of the popular Polly.
Tim Dolor, the bashful, was quite at his ease,
And every one there seemed as easy to please,
And every face beamed with a broadening smile
That broke into ripples of laughter the while,
As the men chose their partners some time in advance
Of the fiddles that had to be tuned for the dance.

Ah, the little sly glances that gave the love-token,
The soft-whispered words by the fond lovers spoken.
Whilst some were coquetting by way of diversion,
There were others inclined to an earnest assertion,

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As around through the rooms and the halls they would
ramble;

The Bold Roland Rare in a light-footed amble,
With an air of a fine condescending compassion,
Gave the latest new step that had come into fashion;
And some fell to giving and guessing new riddles
While the fumbling old fiddlers were fixing their fiddles.

Twice, thrice, had the band leader sprung to his feet
To call for attention, while deftly he beat
On the back of his fiddle, then drew a swift bow
'Crost its sensitive strings that the players might know
'T was time to begin, but a fiddle-string snapped
And put things awry every time that he rapped;
Then tuning and strumming would vie with the horn
That was screeching a monotone strange and forlorn,
While Cupid accepted the timely delay
To lead the fond lovers aside and away.

And meanwhile the "Oracle" wrote some new rhymes
For the dances. Said he, "I write better at times.
My old rhymes were good, to be sure, some were fine,
Very fine—you could hardly find fault with a line.

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On occasions like this, I write new ones." said he,
"For everything here is inspiring to me.
I can write of the things that I see on the spot,
And the dancers will notice that when I take thought,
I just leap upon Pegasus, speed him along,
Till my fancies go rhyming and turn to a song.

"I 'm a very great poet, as every one knows.
See how dreamy I look, and how long my hair grows.
I talk in a rhythm that 's classical, too.
'T were a marvel to tell all the things I can do.
I can dance every jig of the day or tradition,
But while dancing alone is my greatest ambition,
I often indulge in the light recreation
Of keeping the river at just its right station,
So that floods at Dinwiddie occasion no worry—
I have them subside when they get o'er their flurry."

'T was a story oft told, though it hardly deceived,
That the "Oracle" could—which he doubtless believed—
Make the rising Ohio floods quickly subside
When he stretched forth his hand and commanded the
tide.

The Dance of Dinwiddie

'T was a great feat of magic, and if he seemed vain,
His pride was forgiven again and again,
For as often as flood-waters threatened the town,
It was well understood why the tide had gone down;
And for his dance-calling and mystical lore,
His neighbors yclept him the title he bore.

All were merry that night. They proceeded to tear
Up the carpets and rugs so the floor would be bare
For quadrilles and the reels that they all loved so well;
And the lovers who danced—but there 's no use to dwell
Upon that, for all lovers are happy who dance
To the music and whirl with a dizzy side-glance.
So the "Oracle" called from a platform to stand on,
And they danced to his rhymes with a heedless abandon,
While the waters were leaving an Island be-crowned
With a house and a barn on an acre of ground.

* * * * *

(The Oracle Calls.)

And bend the knee in courtesy
To sweethearts and your lovers true;
Next two, with lilting gayety,
The center glide away; now you

The Dance of Dinwiddie

May nimbly trip back to your place,
And balance all—the even time
Will bring you once more face to face
To listen to my “old-time” reeling rhyme.

Come hither, pretty maid and swain,
It is your turn; tiptoe with grace
Adown the center lover’s lane;
With easy turn once more to place,
And now obeisance make to all,
And sweethearts courtesy; with rhyme
And melody, Oh, hear my call
To dance around your “Oracle” this time.

Go flutter like the turtle bird,
Do n’t try to fly—’t would be absurd.
To me there ’s music in the chime
Of twinkling feet with even time.
Lieutenant Love, lead home thy dove,
(The flood is falling up above),
And have her bring an olive sprall
To prove the flood was but a waterfall.

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(O, cynic Simon, have a care;
Twice have you jostled Roland Rare
With elbows angled in the air;
It seems that Polly's witching face
Has so beguiled you with its grace
That you have lost your time and place.)
Fly low, my turtle doves, fly low;
To right and left and form the double row.

And bend the knee in courtesy,
(There was a sometime prophesy)
Your turn sweet bach, Malindy, too.
(And some have thought it would come true,
That floods would some day higher swell
To sweep the valley where we dwell).
Sweet bachelor, prance down the lane,
And with you bring Malindy home again.

And balance all—the even time
Will fill the measure to my rhyme.
(But when the floods shall see my wand,
Obedient to my one command,

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They 'll very soon recede, you 'll find
As heretofore they have declined)
Once more, my cooing doves, once more
Go tell your love-lorn tales as round you soar.

* * * * *

They danced till the "Oracle" said they were through;
If he ran out of rhymes not a soul of them knew;
No one doubted at all he could go on forever,
And ev'ry one thought he was wondrously clever;
Then some one called out for the "Old Gallantry;"
"Oh! 'The Sweet Harry Lee,' let us dance 'Harry Lee,'"
Then, they ev'ry one cried, for it fit their feet neatly
To dance, while it suited their voices completely;
They sang and they danced and there was a resound
That was everywhere heard on the acre of ground.

(The Sweet Harry Lee.)

Oh, have you seen Sweet Harry Lee
With airs so light and breezy,
And such a gentle courtesy
That seems so soft and easy?

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He is so tall and straight and trim
With military talent,
And all the girls run after him,
Because he is so gallant.

For Harry is a soldier bold,
And he 's a great defender,
But when to me his love he told,
His eyes were O, so tender.

And Harry is so daring, too,
I 've heard it very often,
But when he tells his love so true,
His voice will seem to soften.

There 's none can love like Harry Lee,
And none can be so merry,
And then his pleasing gallantry,
So witching and so airy.

Oh, have you seen sweet Harry Lee,
Who calls me "Little Fairy?"
In camp and field, he says, 't is me
He 's coming home to marry.

* * * * *

The Dance of Dinwiddie

Then the waltz! Ah the waltz! What ravishing
pleasure

They felt in the waltz as they reveled its measure,
And how their blood surged with ecstatic sensation
As their dancing feet caught its enchanting creation
Till it bore them, as if, on a smooth gliding stream,
Enraptured away in a beautiful dream;
And the doting old bach'lor rode high on the tide
As he held up Malindy real close to his side—
To furnish the witling whose tongue could n't rest,
A subject to turn to an infinite jest.

The witling was jealous, 't was laughingly said,
And it may have been true, for the fine posing head
Of Malinda was wise and more subtly schemed
Than the wittiest lover has ever yet dreamed;
She could even walk lame to seem easily caught,
And many a lover who ardently sought
To o'ertake her gave up at the last in despair
When he found that her halting was only a snare,
And a month she 'd been leading the witling a chase
When she tagged the old bachelor to run in the
race.

The Dance of Dinwiddie

So what could he do but to fall in the lair
Of her sudden side glance or her innocent stare?
Then away ran the bachelor along with the wit,
And he nearly caught up when she halted a bit,
And it was no great wonder the witling was peeved—
He was being outrun, as he plainly perceived.
'T was but nat'ral for him to give vent to his spleen,
And no one could say, but it really seemed mean
For Malindy to dance and be acting as though
She was tickled to death with a homelier beau.

But the kindly Neoma was there and alert;
She saw the great wit with his proud feelings hurt,
And smiling, she beckoned him over her way,
Where she flattered his pride as a clever girl may,
Till he told all he knew and a score of things more,
Which Neoma, still smiling, as patiently bore;
She sympathized with him. There often is found
A sweet-tempered girl who will care for the wound
Of a lover who loses, and teach him a sanity new,
And sometimes restore his old vanity, too.

Now Malindy had genius; she too had a smile
For all the sweet bachelor said, and the while,

The Dance of Dinwiddie

She had n't neglected to listen as well
To every old yarn that the witling could tell,
And at the right moment she turned a side glance,
Which must have meant something, for off in a prance
It started the witling again to the chase
More hopeful than ever of winning the race;
And Malindy led off with her favorite song
And with her the witling went smiling along.

MALINDY'S SONG

When I was young I often heard
There was no sign or token
By which to know a lover's word
Would not be shortly broken.

I feared to trust love to entwine
Without a due reflection
Around this foolish heart of mine
To ravish its affection.

I thought 't would rob my peace of mind
And force the tear to trickle
Upon a fading cheek to find
The love I loved was fickle.

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And yet it seemed that if I knew
A lover not ungraceful
And I could feel that he was true,
I 'd surely be as faithful.

And really, once there came a beau
Who wooed me very kindly,
But love is blind, I said, and oh!
I feared to love so blindly.

And yet it seemed that very day
I found my heart relenting,
But he was gone, Oh, gone away!
And I was left repenting.

So, often now there comes a day
I seem to be expecting
That love will come and come to stay,
For I have quit reflecting.

* * * * *

“There 's no use reflecting”—a sort of refrain
That went 'round the room and repeated again
When the dancing was over. “I 'm always reflecting,”
Said Roland, quite proudly. “I think you 're expecting

The Dance of Dintwiddie

That some one will love you," laughed shy Letha Lane,
"How sad it would be if she loved you in vain!"
"I should think it were sadder," the great witling said,
"If loving bold Roland, bold Roland she 'd wed."
With a little small wit—a supposed repartee,
Thus every one went on their own merry way.

* * * * *

They gathered in groups, as you 've seen dancers do,
Discussing a well-worn gossip or two;
Louisa was telling a personal affair
Which Neoma was hearing with sisterly care.
'T was a subject some slyly had whispered in jest;
Louisa denied it at first, then confessed
To a folly her heart would no longer conceal,
Which most girls, though dying, would scarcely reveal—
Confession 's a troublesome thing in our youth—
But see how Louisa could tell the whole truth.

LOUISA'S STORY

They tell I passed the store six times to-day
And just to get a glimpse of Alfred Gray.
The very idea of such a thing!
And them a going round a tattling

The Dance of Dinwiddie

As though it all were true! It is n't fair;
But let them talk, I 'm sure I do not care.
Why, as I passed the store I looked away
And never even thought of Alfred Gray.

Now let me see. 'T is about a month or so
Since Alfred called—'t is just a month ago.
I did n't say a word to him that night
Of what I 'd heard, but acted gay and light,
And was n't jealous, either—not a bit,
Not the least, little tiny speck of it.
I talked and laughed, but as he went away
I said, "You 'll get a letter, Alfred Gray."

And that was all I said, except, of course, "Good-bye,"
But after he was gone—I do n't know why—
I angry grew and wrote that letter then.
I told him what I thought of all the men,
And 'bout him calling on my Cousin Kate;
Said I, "It is n't jealousy, but hate,
That prompts me now to write to you this way,
So cease your calling on me, Alfred Gray."

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Next morn I sent the letter off to town,
And Cousin Kate, she heard how I 'd gone down
And how I 'd begged the postal clerk in vain
For him to give the letter back again;
Of course, it was a silly thing in me,
But then it really looked like jealousy,
And worried me to think of it that way—
Not that I cared at all for Alfred Gray.

And when my Cousin Kate came round to call,
She sat up straight, and prim, and proud, and tall,
But I could see a twinkle in her eye,
As after while she bluntly asked me why
I worried 'bout that letter I had sent.
'T was then that all the anger in me pent
Burst forth; I said in my *severest* way,
“ 'T is you who came 'twixt me and Alfred Gray.”

Kate frowned at first, and then she laughed outright,
And said that maybe she could throw some light
Upon the mystery that troubled so.
A friend of hers she said, not long ago,

The Dance of Dinwiddie

Who looked like Alfred, came to call on her—
He looked like Alfred, only handsomer,
She laughed—and people talked—it is their way—
They took the handsome man for Alfred Gray.

Then Kate pretended dignity
And wounded feelings, too, and teasing me,
She said, it hurt her—what I said—and sighed,
Till both began to laugh—and then I cried,
For though I knew Kate told the truth to me,
It added still to my perplexity
If I should then attempt to tell the way
It all had come about to Alfred Gray.

I felt so 'shamed in writing Alfred, then
And he's so stubborn, too, like most the men,
He has n't written me a line as yet.
I maybe do sometimes a little fret,
And maybe, though it does seem very bold,
(You must not tell, or else I'll know who told)
I may have passed the store six times to-day
To get a *little* glimpse of Alfred Gray.

* * * * *

The Dance of Dintwiddie

It had all been arranged and 't was timed to the hour
For Amanda to dance with the old bachelor,
The chap'ron, 't was said, had a song of her own;
She expected, of course, to have sung it alone,
And though she led off in a rather high key,
The dancers all joined her with boisterous glee,
For they slyly had conned it the evening before;
And they made it the jolliest dance on the floor,
And though she protested, it all was in vain,
They began it all over and sang it again.

THE CHAPERON'S SONG

'T is not because I could n't have,
For laws! I've had my chances;
Nor can I say I would n't have,
If some had made advances.

But that 's the way it 's always been
In my experiences;
I never caught among the men
The proper person's glances.

The Dance of Dintwiddie

And goodness knows, I 've often said,
Nor would I now deny it,
'T is better far for one to wed
Or do her best to try it;

But if she fails to find her mate,
Or finding, fails to bind him,
It may turn out a better fate
To never have to mind him.

For now I 'm of a certain age,
Or "old," as you may view it;
And single still, up to this stage
I 've never seemed to rue it.

Still, 't was n't that I would n't have
If some had made advances,
Nor can I say I could n't have,
For laws! I 've had my chances.

It was fine, it was jolly, and no one could tell
How it all came about that the chaperon fell;
It seemed that her hoops, near the end of the dance,
Got caught on the knob of a door by a chance,

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And the knob being firm and the hoops being strong
The hoops had to stay where they did n't belong.
The chaperon tripped and she tumbled, of course,
But was up in a trice, looking not so much worse
While the dancers all laughed but she kept on
a-singing
And never looked back where the hoops were still
clinging.

It was a mistake and the chaperon knew
That she should not have sung—she apologized, too—
There 's no one can tell what the young people think
When their elders look sidewise on folly to wink—
'T is a gap in the fences that leads to the clover,
And the dignified ruling of prudence is over.
They cut up—that 's nothing, they carried it on
Till Malindy, ashamed of the things that were done,
Took the bachelor out for a short, quiet walk
And lectured him soundly on orderly talk
And then he behaved—'t is a marvelous thing
What order from chaos a woman can bring;
But Malindy, of course, had a very wise head
And none ever knew of the thing that she said

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When she took her short stroll with the bachelor.

Well,

There were others to conquer, the wit had a spell,
But she mastered him quickly and put him to rout
By looking askance and pretending to pout.

'T was a trick of Malindy's—the girls of Dinwiddie
All knew it, they laughed and they laughed, oh, so
giddy.

* * * * *

Tim Dolor, the bashful, could sing very well
When once he was rid of his timorous spell;
They coaxed him and pulled him, and though he was
shy,

They would not release him until he would try;
But his voice had the ring of a poor, distressed call,
And the wail of his song was pathetic to all,
For the eyes of Selina had pierced the boy's heart;
'T was also her smile that had speeded the dart.
Poor Dolor was love-sick, as ev'ry one knew,
And his sad song was drowned in the tears that it
drew.

The Dance of Dinwiddie

TIM DOLOR'S SONG

Oh! mother, mother, my poor heart
Is all but now a-breaking;
I 've seen a girl with such an art
Of ways that were so taking.

I thought her smiles were meant for me;
I foolishly grew bolder,
When from that hour 't was plain to see
Her smiles were growing colder.

I loved her so, she was so fair;
With eyes that shone so brightly,
And such a dream of golden hair
That curled and clustered lightly.

She was so fair, I loved her so—
I may have been too daring—
I told her of my love, but oh!
She said she was n't caring.

The Dance of Dintwiddie

Oh! make my bed and make it high,
So that I there may smother
Some of these heart-aches while I lie
Among the feathers, mother.

But mother, mother, do not cry
For this, your boy's undoing,
If 'mong the feathers I should die
I'll not regret my wooing.

* * * * *

'T was midnight; the tables were spread to regale,
Then followed a story, a song and some ale;
The "Oracle" sang of a magical stream
That murmured a strangely mysterious theme;
The shy Letha Lane and the bold Roland Rare
Gave a song and a dance that was passingly fair,
And so plaintive and sad was the sweet bachelor
When he sang of the valley he came from afar,
That Malindy confessed, though she could n't tell why,
It affected her so that she almost could cry.

The Dance of Dinwiddie

THE HAPPY HOLLOW DREAM

(By the "Oracle.")

There 's an unfrequented valley
In the mountain of Somally,
Where the skies so lulling seem,
That they call the "Happy Hollow,"
And you 'll find it if you follow
Up an ever-winding stream.

There if ever you should wander,
Linger for awhile to ponder
By the subtle flowing stream,
Winding over rude or mallow,
Where it murmurs deep or shallow
Of a strange, alluring theme.

For it springs from hidden fountains
In the distant, misty mountains,
Where it weaves a silver ream.
Then it hastens to the valley,
There to whirl and sing and dally
In a dance of crystal gleam.

The Dance of Dintwiddie

It may seem an idle fancy,
Or a scheme of Pegomancy
That was practiced long ago,
But you' ll find that unexpected,
All your being is affected
By the waters murmuring so.

Of the fountains that they sprang from,
Of the mountains that they sang from
At an altitude so high
That they even heard the whispers
In the mornings and the vespers
Of the saints that were so nigh.

And the waters bring the tidings,
And they tell of the abidings
Of departed souls *you* know,
For their voices seemed to follow
Down into the Happy Hollow
Where the winding waters flow.

Where a light that has the seeming
Of a pure benignly beaming—

The Dance of Dintwiddie

Ever there the day and night—
Brings to you a tranquil feeling
Through its soft rays to you stealing
Of a calm, serene delight.

Then you 'll fall to sweetly dreaming
While the mellow light is gleaming
On the ever-winding stream;
And the world will turn to smiling,
Through the strange and soft beguiling
Of the Happy Hollow Dream.

You will hear a loved one singing,
On the waters that are bringing
To your dream-enraptured ear,
Oh! the very tones that ravished
Once your heart until it lavished
Ev'ry love to lovers dear!

And beyond the mind's creation,
In a pleasing presentation,

The Dance of Dintwiddie

Faces to you will appear
Of departed ones you well knew,
Who will smile as if to tell you
They are ever, ever near.

In the mountains of Somally
Where the stream winds through the valley,
And the skies so lulling seem,
There the world will turn to smiling
Through the strange and soft beguiling
Of the Happy Hollow Dream.

* * * * *

Where 's Letha? Where 's Letha? Now where did she go?
And what could possess her to run away so?
“ 'T is like her, she 's shy, and she 's hiding somewhere,
While the bold Roland Rare is awaiting her here.”
Thus the chap'ron ran calling and searching for Letha
Till she found her at last in a hiding beneath a
Round table. “I wish I could stay here and die,”
Said Letha, “I hate to pretend that I cry.”
But she tripped to the floor with a little shy glance,
And began with bold Roland to sing and to dance.

The Dance of Dintwiddie

THE LOVERS' QUARREL

(By Roland Rare and Letha Lane.)

Roland—

Letha Lane, why! Letha Lane,
Now I beg you to explain
Why so many things you say
In that tantalizing way;
 Why you sigh,
 'Tend to cry,
When no tears are in your eye.

Letha—

I could tell you, Roland Rare,
Things of which you 're well aware,
That you 'd hardly care to hear;
Things that sometimes bring a tear
 To my eye,
 Though I try
Not to let you know I cry.

Roland—

Letha Lane, now I would fain
Know the reason you disdain

The Dance of Dintwiddie

To express your thoughts at all—
Any time I 'm asked to call,
 I appear,
 Then I fear
You are vexed that I am near.

Letha—

Roland Rare, how can you dare
Look at me with such an air?
So it seems I called you then,
Oh! how long ago that 's been!
 Not this year,
 And I fear
'T was no other time, my dear.

Roland Rare!

Letha Lane!

Both— { I will tell you once again,
 If you do not cease your fooling,
 You will find my fond love cooling,
 Though it seems you do not care,

Letha Lane!

Roland Rare!

The Dance of Dintwiddie

Roland—

Letha Lane, it is so plain
That your love is on the wane,
And 't is time to say good-bye;
I shall go away and try
 To forget
 That we met,
Though this parting brings regret.

Letha—

Now I ask you, Roland Rare,
Do you think that it is fair
Thus to leave me as you say,
Leave me when I feel this way,
 While I sigh
 And I cry
With real tear-drops in my eye?

Roland—

Letha! Why now, Letha Lane!
Did you think me so insane?
Never meant a word of it;
I was fooling, too, a bit—
 Do not sigh,
 Do not cry,
Why! real tears are in your eye.

The Dance of Dintwiddie

Roland Rare!

Letha Lane!

Both— { We must never quarrel again.
If we do not cease our fooling,
We will find our fond love cooling,
Then, Oh! then, we both will care;

Letha Lane!

Roland Rare!

* * * * *

“I ’m thinking of something I never will tell,”
Came a whispering voice. “Oh, we know it as well,”
Piped a dozen small voices. “You mean about Tim?”
“Oh, every one knows ’bout the Timorous him,
They say he ’s in love with Celina.” “Oh, no,
Why Tim was in love with Jeannette, do n’t you know?”
“Jeannette, who was married a few weeks ago?”
“Yes, he loved her, I ’m sure, for Jeannette told me so.”
“She told us the same, so we know it as well,
But we ’re glad that *you* told us. We never will tell.”

Then they would have a song from the dolorous Tim,
And it seemed there was nothing to do but for him

The Dance of Dintwiddie

To sing them a song that had broken his heart;
He never could sing it but salt tears would start
To his tender blue eyes. Tim Dolor began,
And the dancers all witnessed the tears as they ran
To his chin, where they dangled a moment, then—fell
On the floor, and the dancers all knew very well
That the words of the song were the sad solemn truth,
And every one pitied the heart-broken youth.

TIM DOLOR'S SONG

While I may sing my song of woe,
Pray sympathize politely,
And if my tears should start to flow
Oh, do not treat them lightly.

There was a time I loved a maid—
And none of you will doubt it—
But being shy, I was afraid
To tell the maid about it.

I thought that she would surely know,
Or maybe she would guess it,
And seeing that I loved her so,
Would help me to confess it.

The Dance of Dintwiddie

Oh, secret love with nameless pain,
And only sighs relieving,
And now and then to hope again
To leave your bosom heaving.

One night I thought I heard a bell;
I walked the street and listened;
The night was cold, the snow that fell
Was colder still and glistened.

It was her wedding bell, I knew;
I did not need to guess it;
Another who had loved her, too,
Had hastened to confess it.

I wandered out into the lane
That led up to her dwelling,
And there I stood—I think insane,
I 'm sure, there was no telling.

I saw the guests pass by in glee,
And all of them were laughing,
And every one looked back at me,
And at me seemed a-chaffing.

The Dance of Dintwiddie

They mocked at me so light and gay,
I could not seem to doubt it,
I burst in tears and turned away
And never told about it.

It was sad to the dancers, so sad; but the traces
Of unbidden tears disappeared from their faces;
For as Dolor concluded the hound came a prowling
Right under the window and set up a howling,
Which made the sad singer forget his great trouble
And join in the laughter that bent them all double.
“It seems”, said the witling, “that hounds have reverses
And sing like some others their doggerel verses.”
Then Malindy went pouting again, and the wit
To get even, concluded *he’d* sing for a bit.

THE SONG OF THE WITLING

She pouts, but yesterday she smiled,
And since that moment I have whiled
Away the hours with hope and doubt
And see the lips that smile and pout.

The Dance of Dintwiddie

So high at times she holds her head,
I feel a certain awe or dread,
But when she smiles, I know not why,
Her head seems never held so high.

Her brow and eyes will often frown
Until she sees how I 'm cast down,
And then she 'll turn and sympathize
With placid brow and smiling eyes.

'Gainst pose of head and frown I cope,
For in her smile I find a hope,
And every hour I think about
And see the lips that smile and pout.

* * * * *

From a land so replete with a chivalric story
That even its name is a symbol of glory,
Came a bachelor unloved, but as gentle and kind
As though he were still a fond lover. His mind
Often turned to the valley from which he had come,
For throughout the wide world there was still but one
home

The Dance of Dintwiddie

For which his heart yearned; but he could not return;
It was but a mem'ry, the real home was gone,
And all of the warmth of a bright Southern sun
Could never revive what the war had undone.

SWEET SHENANDOAH

(By the Bachelor.)

I 'm thinking of Sweet Shenandoah
That ever brings a pleasing dream
Of mountain, plain, and winding stream,
And joyous days of long ago,
On silent wings of memory,
Are coming back to me.

I hear the daybreak braggards crow,
As oft I heard that shrill refrain
When there I yawned and slept again;
I hear the noon-day tin horn blow,
Oh, sweeter than Æolian tones,
Its welcome to the hungry zones,
Where men afield with plow and hoe,

The Dance of Dinwiddie

Who hear its call, are turning home—
Their jaded horses, flecked with foam,
Now answer with a knowing neigh—
It all comes back to me.

The meadows there seem ripe to mow,
So tawny, thick, and redolent
The bulky heads are downward bent.
The long, sweet day is there, and oh!
I hear the murmuring melody
Of streams that wind so merrily,
And romp and laugh as on they flow
To mingle with the greater stream,
Then lose themselves as in a dream,
And still by day and night they go
To dream and dream eternally—
It all comes back to me.

How often when the sun would glow,
I've conjured o'er some boyish theme
With lazy lollings by the stream
As past me it would babbling go,

The Dance of Dinwiddie

Till, as the shadows forth would creep,
I've yielded to a drowsy sleep,
Unmindful that the sun was low,
When nature's own sweet lullaby
Came soothingly to me.

Sweet eventide of long ago,
When swallows circled near the barn
And peacocks called their false forlorn;
When over at the dusky row
Was heard the darkies' jamboree,
In weird and unchecked rhapsody;
Far down the milky way would bow—
'T was night and full of witchery
In boyhood days to me.

I'm thinking of sweet Shenandoah
And days before the Civil Strife—
I loved the old Virginia life,
The joyous days of long ago
When all the world to us we knew
Was there; when tears and laughter, too,
Were shared by all; if tears should flow
'T was common cause for sympathy;

The Dance of Dinwiddie

To laugh was to intensify
The cause of laughter so. I grow
To fondly love the memory
That now comes back to me.

* * * * *

“Malindy, Malindy, we ’re waiting for you,”
Cried the dancers, “Come sing of an old lover true,
And tell us which one of them all was the best,
Or if none of them suit who to you have confessed,
Pray tell us if some one you know of will do;
Then sing us a song of a love that is new,
And tell us if ever you mean to be wed;
Or if you intend to stay single instead—
Malindy, Malindy, we all want to know,
Why is it you always are fooling ’round so?”

IN THE ANTE-DELUVIAN DAY

(By Malindy.)

There once was a maid by the name of Mespay,
Who believed in the luck of a leisurely way;
At ninety, ’t was noticed (to tell the whole truth)
She yet had neglected selecting a youth,
Though many had wooed the young maiden, they say,
In the Ante-Deluvian Day.

The Dance of Dintwiddie

'T is a matter of record the Chinese had kept—
At which there are none who have been so adept—
That Jabel had journeyed some hundreds of miles
With a herd of slick cattle to win the maid's smiles,
When she took the whole herd, but she turned him
 away,
In the Ante-Deluvian Day.

Then Jubel came playing a harp made of gold,
Which he gave the fair maiden a moment to hold,
And leaving, he felt it would be a great wrong
If he then would ungallantly take it along,
Still, for one hundred years he remembered, they say,
The maid with the leisurely way.

Then Magella presented the Mount of Tusong,
And Jaered gave the maiden the valley of Hong,
And ev'ry unmarried man sought the maid's hand,
Until she grew rich in both cattle and land,
For she twenty years longer turned lovers away,
In the Ante-Deluvian Day.

The Dance of Dinwiddie

But when Noah appeared, and 'twas well understood
He was building an ark, as he looked for a flood,
She married him when, at one hundred and ten,
She still felt too young to be marrying then,
But she did it to prove, as the Chinese will say,
There is luck in the leisurely way.

* * * * *

The fiddles were heard and they turned to the dance
As though ev'ry one there had awaited the chance
To be first on the floor for the old waltz quadrille,
Which they never had danced but it brought a new
thrill.

They glided and whirled with a giddy, gay swing,
Nor thought of the morrow nor what it would bring,
For midnight was only a part of the night,
While the night was all theirs till the morn's early light;
All they cared for was there, and so why should they
borrow

The shadow of thought for the coming to-morrow?

Thus, thoughtless of danger and heedless of warning
The dancing went on till the dawn of the morning,

The Dance of Dinwiddie

When in terror the dancers then found that the flood
Had surrounded the house and the barn, and they stood
On an island alone in the midst of the stream.

'T was as if they had waked from a long, pleasing
dream

To a fate that was ugly and stern, and appalled
At impending destruction, they frantic'ly called;
Some cried for a father, and some for a brother,
And screaming they ran from one side to the other.

And if, for a moment, their fears would subside,
Their terror returned as they watched the high tide,
For the river seemed angry that swept o'er the high-
ways,

And madly it rushed o'er the country and byways,
As with threats of destruction it held its mane high
Like a monster that brooks no obstructions that lie
In its way, while it lashed with its tail at the shore;
Over country and highway, apast them it tore
With a swirl and a whirl as the high waves would break
To dash on the island a yellowish flake.

Since the Red Men had named it "the beautiful river,"
No flood tide was like it, nor yet was there ever

The Dance of Dinwiddie

Such woe on the fair verdant banks at its shore,
As higher and onward the great torrent bore,
As downward and forward the avalanche tore.
'T was as wide as the valley from hill unto hill,
And as deep as the valley with turmoil to fill;
It bent the great oak standing upright and bold;
It swept away houses, the new with the old,
And together the hut and the mansion were rolled.

Oh! often the "Oracle" gave his command
In a grand, sweeping wave with his lily-white hand;
But the flood only laughed at the magical wand;
And strange now to say, but the dancers did hope
That somewhere a power was in it to cope
'Gainst the flood. They were ready to catch at a straw,
For drowning ones know neither reason nor law,
And to that which they ridiculed many a day
They anxiously turned in their fear and dismay,
Half trusting by that their destruction to stay.

We may laugh at all creeds, and discredit tradition,
But danger discovers our blind superstition.
When our bodies are sick and we lie on our backs,
If we can not find doctors we send for the quacks;

The Dance of Dintwiddie

And if one should grow worse, there is no use denying
That the priest whom he scoffed at he wants when he 's
dying;

In the absence of doctors or priests or of creeds,
We then turn to conjure with magical deeds.

'T was the same with the dancers—they wanted to live,
And were ready to take what the faker could give.

'T was a pitiful sight and a helpless appeal,
For the dancers' dilemma was awful and real.

Though the stronger among them their fears would
conceal,

Still, their actions would show the forebodings they 'd
feel.

There was motive enough, there was courage; in
fact,

They were anxious to dare, but were helpless to act,
Ah! some would have risked there the watery grave
If assured that their sweethearts by that they could
save;

The occasion, the time, and the motive were there,
Had they only known how, they were ready to dare.

The Dance of Dintwiddie

While the daring was there, still the river was wide,
And an effort to rescue seemed useless if tried;
So they talked and they planned with their heads close
together;

They looked at the river and also the weather,
And the lovers were gathered real close to each
other—

For the loud-roaring river their voices would smother—
And if still not so happy, they knew in each breast
Was a feeling far deeper than either had guessed;
But the river was wild, Oh! so wild and distracting,
'T was hard to tell love from hysterical acting.

From the house to the barn and returning again,
They wandered about till they came to the lane
That led past the house, and uneasily ever,
Retracing their footsteps, they watched the wild river;
They saw the fixed marks they had set as a gauge
Disappear in the flood as it reached to that stage;
They saw a house floating apast them at last,
They heard a child scream in the house as it passed!
Amazed and bewildered, they sought ev'rywhere
To escape from the peril that threatened them there.

The Dance of Dintwiddie

But neither a boat nor a skiff was at hand
Which they felt had the strength 'gainst the waves to
withstand,

Save an old, dinky john-boat, and it was n't fit,
Yet Dan, the bass-fiddler, went rowing in it
To see, so he said, if the john-boat would do,
When out in the current the dinky boat flew,
And the fiddler was helpless and had to go, too.
They saw with alarm that his danger still grew
As the boat on an end like a bobble was toss'd,
Then plunged to a depth where it seemed to be lost.

There breathless they stood in an agonized fear
When they saw him ride high to again disappear;
But bravely he fought with the oars at his side,
Though his efforts were futile to stem the high tide;
They saw the boat whirl in an eddy away,
Till it seemed he ceased striving in utter dismay;
Then the dancers seemed paralyzed there on the place,
And horror was stamped upon ev'ry pale face;
They heard his wild cries and it filled them with gloom,
He went from their view, and they thought to his
doom.

The Dance of Dinwiddie

They stood there in terror and thought of his fate.
It redoubled the fear of their own trying state,
And the ghost of poor Dan seemed to everywhere walk
In their midst—they were dazed and unable to talk;
For many were there who in life had seen naught
Of the horrors like that which that day to them brought,
And now when they realized all that had come,
They cried, Oh! they screamed for the loved ones at
home,

But their voices were drowned in the maddening roar
And their tears dimmed the view of the far distant shore.

We shrink from imprisonment ever afar;
We fight against water, the wall, or the bar
That would keep us from freedom to do as we will;
Even lovers or comrades together are still,
Never nearly so happy when liberty 's gone;
So they brought up the wine—something had to be
done—

And all the men drank it to steady their nerve,
For Twilley had told them that wine would preserve
The courage of man where there 's danger to face,
And the women all ate, as they cried 'round the place.

The Dance of Dinwiddie

For women eat more when they feel they 're in trouble,
And men not so much, but they drink about double.
True, 't is better in flood times to keep duly sober,
Like Noah of old did—the flood was all over
When he was so drunken—for he understood
(After being forewarned) how to handle a flood,
While the dancers lacked wisdom to know what to do,
For the strange situation was awkward and new;
But if they seemed foolish and often uncouth,
'T was still but the weakness and folly of youth.

Now Twilley was thoughtful, and (not to repeat)
Though very good-natured, was also discreet;
He cautioned the men not to drink more than needed,
And, of course, he had felt his advice would be heeded,
But the men were but men, and the most were mere
boys,

At that uncertain age called the "hobble-de-hoys,"
Unused to the wine, or the shame that it brings,
And quite self-important, but (innocent things)
How could they when older become very sage
If they had n't learned something at that early age?

The Dance of Dinwiddie

The flood was declining at noon-time that day,
And danger seemed held in abeyance away.
The clouds rolled away, and the afternoon sun
Looked down with a smile that was brim-full of fun.
The dancers held councils and hoped for the best
Till all were more tranquil and much less distressed,
And as most of the dancers were youthful in years,
And none had grown old in their hearts, so their fears
Were more transient to them than to those who were
older,
While their daring, as well as their folly, was bolder.

Day waned into night, and with no sign of rain,
They had dreaded the night, but the moon shone again
And that seemed the signal that none were to die,
So they sat down to eat with the table banked high,
And glad with the thought of the waters declining,
They forgot all their trials and soon began dining,
And all of them dallied a little with wine
(To get up a courage) and some feeling fine
Sprang up with a song and went dancing around
All over the house on the acre of ground.

The Dance of Dintwiddie

'T was as if they had suddenly lost all their fears,
Or had burst into laughter while still in their tears.
They capered and romped in a strange childish glee,
While Malindy was singing hilariously.

The chaperone scolded and coaxed them in vain
To heed what she said, and be decent and sane;
To remember their danger and think of poor Dan;
She cried and she screamed, but they every one ran
And left their hen-mamma so anxious and fond,
Like so many gosling, to swim in the pond.

And what though the fiddlers felt sleepy and droned
Or even the fiddles went harsh and untuned,
So long as the drum was sufficiently jarred,
The dance was too maudlin to feel the discord,
The witling went whirling in ancient ghwazee,
But just what to call it no two could agree.

"A damsel once danced it," the great witling said,
"When her sweet mamma wanted the great Baptist's
head."

If he meant to be gruesome, they said he was shallow,
And as none would dance with him he danced with his
shadow.

The Dance of Dintwiddie

The bold Roland Rare was possessed with a swagger
That had all the grace of a common blind stagger,
While Simon, the cynic, looked on with a sneer,
And every time Roland passed grinned with a leer.
The folly went on as it had gone before,
Till some growing thoughtful, refused to dance
more;

Then directly most every one seemed of like thought,
For the wine was all gone, and the ones who had sought
The wine cup the most, had a look as if taunted
By more than the fear with which others were haunted.

For the pleasure from wine turned to mockery soon,
And the sweetest song then had remorse in its tone.
When the spirit they found in the cup that was brought
Turned a weakling and died and their nerves were dis-
traught.

Then their folly to them seemed as dark as a crime
Which could never be whitened by penance or time—
Crash! ev'rywhere out of doors, crash and splash!
The drift-wood and water and yellow waves dash.
And in the room there all the women are crying,
While all the men suffer a weakness as trying.

The Dance of Dintwiddie

For their nerves were so racked by the roar of the
river

That the men felt their danger more keenly than
ever;

But one told a story and some tried to smile
With efforts to rally the others the while
From cowardly fearing; then some fell asleep
To awake with a start and upon the floor leap;
But Simon, the cynic, still looked with a sneer,
And ev'ry time Roland waked, grinned with a leer;
And assuming his swagger with impudent mocking,
He sang with a ribaldry meant to be shocking.

SIMON'S SONG

Arrayed in fine linen, we go to a ball,

Where we banquet with friends whom we joyously
meet,

And we revel down wine and the savories all

Mid flowers and the music so lang'rously sweet;
But anon, while we linger the banqueting sours
In these bothersome bodies of ours.

The Dance of Dinwiddie

Then in stupor we sleep while our spirits take flight
To places unknown in a wondering dream,
And we fall from a tower in a horrible fright,
Where we strangle and drown in a deep-rolling
stream;

For our spirits may soar all alone to high towers,
But they fall with these bodies of ours.

We have faith and a hope and some charity, too,
We trust in our preacher, or elder, or pope,
And so far as we know, 't is the best thing to do,
But the fall shakes our faith and we all but lose hope
When we think of the grave and the worm that de-
vours

These bothersome bodies of ours.

Still, 't is hard to stay drowned very long in a dream
When one is so restless in body and mind,
So we struggle and flounder from out of the stream
To awake in a cold, clammy sweat, and we find
That the trouble 's a banquet with music and flowers
In these bothersome bodies of ours.

The Dance of Dinwiddie

He sang it as though it o'erflowed with his wit,
And the dancers were glad when he got through with it.
Even danger no longer could keep them from sleep,
Which was fitful to some, whilst to others 't was deep,
But they left not the room where in circles they
grouped,

Or they lounged in the chairs, as when sleeping they
drooped.

They were tired, Oh! so tired, and with all so distressed,
They slept in discomfort, but tried to find rest,
When suddenly every one woke with a fear—
A storm was approaching, they felt it was near.

They heard the wind moaning among the tall trees,
Then louder and swift sprang the shrill eastern breeze,
Until the house shook from the force of its sway,
And they felt the trees bend as their shadows would play;
Then the rain began falling, though lightly at first,
Till directly it seemed like a sweeping cloud-burst;
When a flash of sharp lightning had blinded the room,
A terrific loud peal like a great cannon's boom
Came thundering above them with crashing resound
That made the house quake on the acre of ground.

The Dance of Dintwiddie

Then to every one came an alarm for their daring
And folly. In silence, with awe in their bearing,
They tiptoed to look out of window and door,
Then out in the darkness and in the down-pour
Of the rain to the edge of the water they wandered.
The river was rising! They shivered and pondered,
And they peered through the gloom for help that
might come,
But it came not! it came not! They turned to the home
Through the darkness of night and the chill of the
air,
They groped to the house in an utter despair.

A cry of distress from without reached their ears,
Then louder it grew, and with strange, haunting fears,
They trembled and listened to hear it again,
When above the loud roar and the storm and the rain,
Like a wail of the lost came the heart-rending cry.
Some fainted; some stood with a wide-staring eye
And ran from the room on a rescue to start,
Whilst others sprang up with a fast beating heart,
When the crying grew faint, like a nightmare it pass'd,
But it left with the dancers the shadow it cast.

The Dance of Dinwiddie

The storm was abating, the rainfall had ceased,
The terrible roar for a time had decreased,
The dancers were thoughtful and quiet at last,
And hopeful, perhaps, that the worst had now passed,
When, horrors! Again came a cry of despair,
Then louder and longer it hung in the air;
“Oh, some one is drowning,” they screamed as they
flew

Through the hall and the doorway—so sure it was
true—

And there in the darkness, with no moon to see by,
They found the hound howling most piteously.

That ominous sound was to them the death token;
They returned to the house, and without a word spoken
(Their feelings too awed for a word or a tear),
To sit there in silence and tremble in fear,
Till some one spoke softly of Dan and his fate;
Then Malindy grew nervous—the strain was too great—
She rose to her feet with an uncertain totter,
And weaving around till the bachelor caught her,
“How awful!” she sighed, as she fell in a swoon,
“To hear a hound howling without any moon!”

The Dance of Dintwiddie

There then was confusion—the table knocked over
And likewise the chairs—but the bachelor lover
Held fast to Malindy, as all lovers should;
Malindy lay quiet—but that 's understood—
The witling ran errands and acted real nice,
While Neoma was rubbing, and all gave advice,
Or all save the Cynic, who grinned 'round the place,
Till Malindy came to, when she hid her sweet face
In the bachelor's arms, where they left her alone,
“Come away,” cried the Cynic, “at last she is won.”

There was no more dancing throughout the dark night,
So intently they longed for the coming of light,
For danger and darkness are frightfully mated
When danger approaches where darkness has waited.
They heard the wild river loud laughing and jeering!
It mocked at their fears while it ever was nearing;
Then they huddled in groups, as do creatures when
caged,
When they heard the mad monster that roared and
raged—
He was coming, was coming, they knew by the sound,
He would sweep the house off of the acre of ground.

The Dance of Dintwiddie

At daybreak the water was high in the barn.
They moved all the horses and cattle and corn
Near the house, and there likewise they stacked up the
hay.

Thus the morning hours passed with forebodings
away,

With many reproaches and bitter complaints,
That none came to rescue—and two or three faints.
If in darkness they 'd longed for the coming of light,
(While regretting their folly, they 'd thought of their
plight),

Still the danger seemed greater that noon-day had
brought,

As even that came with a new peril fraught.

For the river still rose and the horses and cattle
Stood in water to knees; t' was in earnest a battle
For life, for the whole of the great bulk of hay
That the dancers had stacked had now floated
away,

And the corn had all gone, leaving nothing to eat—
It was hard for the cattle to stand on their feet.



They saw it sink low to its roof in the tide—
Where the great hound had climbed in safety to ride.

The Dance of Dinwiddie

Some one cried, "O! look yonder—the barn is afloat!"
And sullen and black like a water-soaked boat,
They saw it sink low to its roof in the tide
Where the great hound had clambered in safety to
ride.

For the current was swift and the wagon had gone
That the dancers had come in as others had done
From the lot; now away swam a cow, then another—
The cattle and horses all went. " 'T is no bother
For horses and cattle to swim for the shore,"
The "Oracle" said, as he tore off a door;
And he would have jumped headlong with door in the
flood,

But the men held him fast while the women all stood
There and screamed till a panicky feeling went 'round
To all that was left of the acre of ground.

They heard a shrill whistle, and help seemed at hand,
For around the great bend came the steamer *Renand*;
Their hearts filled with hope; to their eyes came the tear
That sprang from their joy as the steamer came near.

The Dance of Dinwiddie

With frantic wild gestures, they signaled the boat;
She was coming their way, they with rapture could note.
Then another shrill whistle—a strange, startled scream.
She turned from her course and she fled down the stream
As though their loud yelling had filled her with fear—
Apast them she sped like a frightened white deer.

Ah! the tears of the sweet, pretty dancers would call
For a saint or dare-devil to rescue them all.
They could look to the hill to see daring men steer
With effort to reach them, and once they came near,
But were carried away by the rush of the tide.
And often again was it desperately tried
By many who valiantly fought with the wave,
And risked their own life, hoping others to save,
While ev'ry frail dancer stood near to the river,
Despairing at each unsuccessful endeavor.

The "Oracle" said, "Could I swim like Leander
Of Hellespont fame, I would take one and land her
On shore, then return for another, and so on,
Until every fair dancer around here was gone;
For having the courage and vigor and vim,
I wish in my heart that I knew how to swim.

The Dance of Dinwiddie

But there 's no use to worry, or climb a steep hill
Till a person comes to it—you 've heard of that—still
If I only could swim, I could quickly go through it,
Should the river still rise—I may anyway do it."

Then he called on Peneus, he thought it was best,
As he 'd often approached him when sorely distressed;
He was sure that Peneus would listen to him;
He would have him turn trouble, though hope was so
dim,

To a travesty there on the acre of ground;
But the river god nowhere it seemed could be found,
(He may have been busy with some other care),
And they got no reply to the "Oracle's" prayer;
Then the "Oracle" said he would try his own scheme;
So he stretched forth his hand and commanded the
stream:

O, wayward stream!
Return and to thy channel keep,
Where thou hast droned in drowsy sleep
For full a century of years,
And have our love without our fears.

The Dance of Dinwiddie

How have we loved thee, O, great stream!
And thou hast been to us a theme
As pleasing as the sweetest dream,
Why do you turn with sullen hate,
All swollen in your drunken sate?

Relent! Relent!
Abate the currents that have bent
Thy body so enormously.
O, backward to thy channel flow
And stay thy riot and its woe.

But the flood was too big for one man to assuage;
It continued to rise and to roar and to rage;
It had gotten a start, and it now seemed too late
For the great dancing master to check or abate.
He realized that he had been in the wrong
To neglect to attend to the flood for so long.
“At first I had seemed to enjoy it,” he said,
“But, like dancing, the fiddler will have to be paid;
Still, ’t is better,” said he, “not to let our hearts worry,
For the flood will subside when it gets o’er its
flurry.”

The Dance of Dinwiddie

Some complained that he 'd uselessly raised their hope
high,

Then the "Oracle" said he would save them or die.
He proposed that he build them a raft out of logs,
And he worked for a while, but his fine dancing togs
Got bedraggled—he 'd fallen asprawl in the flood,
Where he floundered around in the water and mud,
Till they grappled him out. Oh! it seemed such a
shame!

He looked at his raiment, he spoke of his fame;
He declared he just knew he looked worse than the
hound

That had gone with the barn from the acre of ground.

Then ev'ry one felt they had lost their last chance,
Whilst the "Oracle" stood like a man in a trance—
He had lost his fine book of dance-calls, with its verses,
Morose from his losses, in silence or curses,
He lamented the folly of building the raft,
For misfortune had struck with a swift, heavy shaft,
And his proud spirit broke when he saw that the flood
Had bespattered his coat with the yellow clay mud.
'T was a humiliation, deserving compassion—
Most people lose heart when they go out of fashion.

The Dance of Dintwiddie

So Simon, to comfort him, said, "Do not worry;
The flood will subside when it gets o'er its flurry."
"And your rhymes," said the wit, "They were mostly
old rhymes;

They were fine, to be sure, but 't is better at times
To write something new; on occasions like these
One should write on the spot of the thing that he sees."
"For shame!" cried Neoma. She led him away
To help the poor "Oracle" scrub off the clay;
She rubbed him and scrubbed him and wheedled him
'round,

Till he said he was glad that he did n't get drowned.

Now the house became flooded, and to the top floor
They were driven. In eddies the flood waters tore
Around through the hall and the parlor below
Till it burst through the windows to vent its o'erflow.
The tuneful piano went waltzing around
With the tables for partners or what else it found,
Till, dizzy at times, it would bump on the wall,
When its vibrating strings gave a discordant brawl
As if in abandon it turned debauchée
To sicken their heart with its sad revelry.

The Dance of Dinwiddie

They saw as they looked from the windows above
The bric-a-brac leaving, with emblems of love,
An album, the old family Bible, and all
Of Twilley's fine pictures that hung on the wall.
They saw them pass out of the windows below,
Both single and double they filed in a row
Out into the world on the turbulent wave
To swim or to find there a watery grave;
And last came that motto, the "God Bless Our Home,"
Went floating away on the yellowish foam.

That grieved the poor Twilley. He did n't care much
For pictures and albums or Bibles and such,
But that "God Bless Our Home" was the pride of his
heart;

He always had thought it a piece of fine art;
He had spent a whole Sunday in placing the shells,
And had worked on it two or three days at odd spells---
Smash! "Great Heavens!" asked Simon, "What can
that all be?"

"Oh, nothing," said Twilley, "except a huge tree
That is raking its length 'gainst the house as it passes
To break a few more of the front window glasses."

The Dance of Dinwiddie

Day and night they had kept the tired vigil while
 waiting,
And hoping the waters would soon be abating;
But nearer and nearer the high waters rose
A space at a time as a risin' flood grows;
And if they were hungry, they thought not of that;
If they wanted for sleep, still, they wide-awake sat.
They feared that some madness would seize them while
 there,
For they felt a great dreading of something so dire
That menaced and seemed like the haunting of fate,
And frowned with a visage as ugly as hate.

The threats of the weak brought alarm to the stronger,
For to some the suspense was unbearable longer,
And a murmur was heard of a way that was brief,
To end all in a plunge that would bring a relief;
From the tense agony and the painful delay
Of a hope against hope through the night and the day;
For although it is true, there is hope while there's
 breath,
Still some rush to death while the end *is* but death,
As though anguish of thought finds its only surcease
To yield quickly to death and its certain release.



Lord, help us and save us; we ask for no crown,
But we do want the house till the flood shall go down.

The Dance of Dintwiddie

For it seemed there were few who had thought from
the first

That the flood would go on till it came to the worst:
The Cynic sat anxious, with face blanching white,
His tremors betraying the state of his fright;
The wit, who had jabbered his thin airy gibes,
Now turned him to whining in whimpering dribes;
And minus the old-time bravado he wore,
Was the "Oracle" nervously pacing the floor.
They were all much alike as they thought of their fate,
But they counseled each other to stay there and wait.

In the room where they danced on the evening before
The water was slushing above the hall door.

It had followed them there as they moved up above,
Persistently followed—they felt the house move!
Their hearts then stood still, and the "Oracle" said,
"Let us pray;" so the dancers knelt down while he
prayed,

As only a helpless, dependent one can.

He ended his prayer in the way he began—

"Lord help us and save us! We asked for no crown,
But we do want the house till the flood should go down."

The Dance of Dintwiddie

His praying seemed awkward to some, it is true,
But the most of them thought that perhaps it would
do,

For the house was still standing when prayer was
through,

Still, they heard the house creaking—'t was leaning
some, too—

Then a yellow wave came with a swell, and it made
The house groan as it turned half around, but it stayed
For a moment to get its true bearings just right,
Then it plunged till the top floor alone was in sight,
And swiftly it sped as it whirled down the stream,
Sans captain or pilot, sans rudder or steam.

And once the house tilted when bumping ground
Till very far listed, but righted around;
Then the smashing of timbers that made their hearts
ache,

And the strained and warped floors that seemed ready
to break

Made them shudder and fly when the waters would
swirl

As ever and ever they sped in a whirl,

The Dance of Dinwiddie

And the world seemed unsteady with nothing to stay
While the hills flew in circles a distance away,
And they all but gave up to the fate that had frowned
As they went with the house from the acre of ground.

They were dumb. Not a soul but had ceased to complain;

They felt they were doomed, and to struggle was vain.
Some covered their faces and muffled their ears;
Some trembled and shook as with palsy from fears.
Like children they clung to each other and waited
In terror and silence, as if they were fated,
Or looked at each other wild-eyed and in wonder,
And hurdling together were thrown asunder
By the surging and swirling of onrushing water,
And were pent up and helpless as lambs for the slaughter.

Then the dark moment passed and a hope came again;
It came like the smile of the sun through the rain,
For the current had turned and toward the south
veering,
They could see, with a joy, that the hills they were
nearing;

The Dance of Dintwiddie

And the house was now slowing as onward it bore,
While people came running to meet them on shore,
As nearer and nearer the house-boat had veered,
Where were all of the town folks who heard and had
feared

They were lost, and among them the care-worn mothers,
The anxious old fathers and sisters and brothers.

Then out from the shore came the same dinky "John"
That the trusting old fiddler had rode away on,
And strange though it seemed, there was Dan in the
boat

That had weathered the storms and was still there
afloat.

Then the cheers of the dancers rang out to the shore,
And ev'ry eye swam with the tears that it bore.
The "Oracle" suddenly came to life, too,
As often 't is found where there 's hope people do;
He shouted and waved with the wildest delight,
When the recognized forms of his friends came in sight.

He cried, "Oh, we 've all had a lark of a time!
We 've been up to Twilley's to dance to my rhyme,

The Dance of Dinwiddie

And water-bound there since we left the old town,
We have danced day and night, and the most the way
down;

We grew tired of the place, and we thought we 'd come
home.

All the dancers are with us—they wanted to come.
As the stream was rough swimming and too deep to
wade,

We concluded to come on the trip the house made.
How 's the folks at Dinwiddie? There 's no use to
worry,

The flood will subside when it gets o'er its flurry."

Though the moments had seemed to the dancers so
frightened,

Like so many hours, yet their hearts were so lightened
With hope, that they took the bed-slats and rowed
on

With a strange, nervous strength that seemed hardly
their own,

After all of the trials through which they had gone,
And the dauntless bass fiddler rowed swiftly the
"John,"

The Dance of Dinwiddie

To help them to land near the dancers' own town,
Where some cried, and some danced with the crowds
that came down,

And many gave thanks with a quivering lip—
They were safe! They were safe! from the perilous trip.

There the house that the dancers had come in was
moored,

Where the tale of its marvelous venture still lured
The thousands long after the flood had declined,
Till piece-meal from vandals and weather combined,
It fell to decay, or was carried away.

'T was a favorite pastime on any fine day
For the thoughtless to waltz through the house with
a song

And leaving to carry a relic along,
Until nothing was left of the house that withstood
The perils that came with the eighty-four flood.

The tall trees are standing, still standing alone,
Where they whisper each other the nights they have
known,

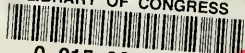
The Dance of Dintwiddie

And if they seem lonely without the old house,
Yet the birds in the evenings go there to carouse.
There they chatter and sing in their merriest lay,
And, like dancers, choose partners in much the same
way;
And the boatmen will tell how they sometimes have
heard
There the singing of songs—not the notes of a bird—
As though festive, gay spirits still hovered around,
Late, late in the night on the acre of ground.



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